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Congress of the United States

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Christopher Shays, Connecticut
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MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging
Threats, and International Relations

From: Christopher Shays 
Chairman

Date: April 20, 2006

Subject: Briefing memo for the April 25 Subcommittee hearing

Attached find the briefing memo required by Committee rules for the hearing on Tuesday April 25th entitled, *A New Assessment of Iraq*. The hearing will convene at 10:00 a.m., room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building.

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BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT,
INDEPENDENT

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations

From: Nicholas Palarino, PhD., Staff Director, and Major Marc LaRoche, Legislative Intern

Date: April 18, 2006

Subject: Briefing memorandum for the hearing entitled, *A New Assessment of Iraq* scheduled for Tuesday, April 25, 2006 at 10:00 a.m. in room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building.

PURPOSE OF HEARING

The hearing will examine the status of Iraq's reconstruction, governance, and security. The hearing will specifically address the efforts to establish public access to essential services, to form a unity government, and to grow the Iraqi security and police forces.

HEARING ISSUES

1. What measurable progress has been made in Iraq in the areas of reconstruction, governance, and security?
2. What goals have been established in these areas and what more remains to be done?

BACKGROUND

There are daily assessments of the progress in rebuilding and stabilizing Iraq. Some of these assessments arrive at drastically different conclusions with respect to the current state and direction of the efforts to improve security, establish public access to essential services, and support the fledgling government.

The most optimistic of these assessments is contained in the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq (NSVI). This document, published by the National Security Council (NSC) in November 2005, was an official White House response to increasing criticism of the administration's handling of the security and stability phase of the war in Iraq. Earlier this month the administration submitted its first Report to Congress pursuant to the U.S. Policy in Iraq Act ¹ (**Attachment 1, pg. 12**)

The report describes the current military, diplomatic, political and economic measures that are being or have been undertaken in Iraq to complete the mission successfully. Both of these official documents put a positive and optimistic spin on the situation in Iraq. Acknowledging stubborn resistance on the part of the insurgents, the official position downplays the overall impact of these acts of violence and sabotage and focuses mainly on the long term prospects of a stable Iraqi government.

The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq

The NSVI articulates the broad strategy the President set forth in 2003 and provides an update on the progress as well as the challenges remaining. The NSVI contains three broad tracks with specific goals that must be met in order for the U.S. to declare victory in Iraq. The three tracks are the Political Track, the Economic Track, and the Security Track. The NSVI emphasizes that progress along one of these tracks reinforces progress along the other tracks. In this way, the three pillars of the National Strategy are integrated and mutually supporting. Furthermore, the strategy is conditions based and each of the three tracks has reinforcing measures which are defined as follows:

¹ Report to Congress: Pursuant to U.S. Policy in Iraq Act, National Defense Authorization Act, Section 1227, Fiscal Year 2006 (PL 109-163), 6 April 2006, pg. 12.
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/64353.pdf>.

The Political Track involves working to forge a broadly supported national compact for democratic governance by helping the Iraqi government:

- *Isolate* enemy elements from those who can be won over to the political process by countering false propaganda and demonstrating to all Iraqis that they have a stake in a democratic Iraq;
- *Engage* those outside the political process and invite in those willing to turn away from violence through ever-expanding avenues of participation; and
- *Build* stable, pluralistic, and effective national institutions that can protect the interests of all Iraqis, and facilitate Iraq's full integration into the international community.

The Economic Track involves setting the foundation for a sound and self-sustaining economy by helping the Iraqi government:

- *Restore* Iraq's infrastructure to meet increasing demand and the needs of a growing economy;
- *Reform* Iraq's economy, which in the past has been shaped by war, dictatorship, and sanctions, so that it can be self-sustaining in the future; and
- *Build* the capacity of Iraqi institutions to maintain infrastructure, rejoin the international economic community, and improve the general welfare of all Iraqis.

The Security Track involves carrying out a campaign to defeat the terrorists and neutralize the insurgency, developing Iraqi security forces, and helping the Iraqi government:

- *Clear* areas of enemy control by remaining on the offensive, killing and capturing enemy fighters and denying them safe-haven;
- *Hold* areas freed from enemy influence by ensuring that they remain under the control of the Iraqi government with an adequate Iraqi security force presence; and
- *Build* Iraqi Security Forces and the capacity of local institutions to deliver services, advance the rule of law, and nurture civil society.²
(Attachment 2, pg. 1-2)

² National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, pg. 1-2, November, 2005.

The extent to which these tracks are integrated becomes apparent upon closer examination. For example, many infrastructure projects are behind schedule or over budget as a result of poor security conditions in Iraq. Similarly, the bombing of the Al Askari Mosque (the Golden Mosque) in Samarra in February of this year led to increased clashes between Sunni and Shiite tribes and has contributed to a political stalemate and the failure to agree on the next prime minister.

Despite these setbacks, particularly from the bombing of the Golden Mosque, there are signs of progress. For instance, as the political process moves forward, terrorists will become more isolated, leading to more intelligence on security threats from Iraqi citizens, which will lead to better security, a more stable infrastructure, the prospect of economic progress, and expanding political participation.

Contradicting these official assessments are daily reports in the leading newspapers that seem to focus exclusively on periodic setbacks and select negative information coming out of Iraq. Nearly five months after the publication of the NSVI, several reports accuse the administration of having retrogressed based on the standards set forth in the NSVI.

One such article was published in the April 9th edition of the New York Times. The Times obtained an internal staff report by the United States Embassy and the military command in Baghdad.³ (**Attachment 3**) The 10-page report, dated January 31, provides a province-by-province snapshot of Iraq's political, economic and security situation, and rating the overall stability of Iraq's 18 provinces. Although the report was compiled for use by Coalition leaders in Iraq, these assessments are now being interpreted, and in some cases misread, by a broader audience that is not entirely informed of the ongoing efforts by the military and the State Department on the ground in Iraq.

An appraisal of the progress in Iraq is available in the periodic reports and updates prepared by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Starting in May 2003 with a detailed report addressed to the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the

³ Schmitt, Eric and Edward Wong, "U.S. Study Paints Somber Portrait of Iraqi Discord," *The New York Times*, 9 April, 2006.

House Committee on International Relations, the GAO presented the range of issues related to rebuilding Iraq.⁴

In February 2006, GAO testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee entitled *Rebuilding Iraq: Stabilization, Reconstruction, and Financial Challenges* laid out the challenges that the United States still faces and those the Iraqi government faces in financing future requirements. The testimony surmises, “the United States has set broad goals for providing essential services in Iraq, but limited performance measures present challenges in determining the overall impact.” (**Attachment 4**)

Even before the publication of the NSVI, both the House and Senate conducted hearings on the reconstruction and stabilization efforts in Iraq. In October 2005, for example, the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations held a hearing entitled *Iraq: Perceptions, Realities and Cost to Complete*. Chairman Shays asked the Inspectors General with oversight responsibilities for reconstruction in Iraq to testify on the work by their respective agencies. The general consensus was that much has been accomplished, but that security costs were hampering some reconstruction efforts. (**Web Resource 1**)

DISCUSSION OF HEARING ISSUES

1. What measurable progress has been made in Iraq in the areas of reconstruction, governance, and security?

Reconstruction Progress in Iraq

The Department of State reports that despite concerted efforts by terrorists and insurgents to derail assistance efforts, there was measurable progress along the economic track. Iraq’s economy grew from \$18.9 billion in 2002 to \$33.1 billion in 2005. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 2.6 percent in 2005, and expects real GDP to grow by 10.4 percent in 2006. While the Iraqi economy continued to be overwhelmingly dependent on oil exports, which accounted for approximately two-thirds of GDP and over 95 percent of government

⁴ Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Rebuilding Iraq*, GAO-03-792R, 15 May 2003. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03792r.pdf>.

revenue in 2005, other sectors began to pick up activity, including the services and trade sectors. (**Attachment 1, pg. 5**)

International economic assistance came primarily from the United States⁵, but also from other international partners, who pledged \$13.5 billion in economic aid. This international aid has been critical to helping boost overall Iraqi economic growth and rehabilitate its infrastructure, which in 2003 the World Bank estimated would cost about \$55 billion.

Reconstruction efforts in Iraq have taken many forms. Those efforts of greatest import to the stability of Iraq are in the areas of essential services. These areas include the water and sanitation sector, the health sector, and the electricity sector.

Under the Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF), the U.S. programmed \$4.2 billion for electricity, \$2.1 billion for water, \$1.7 billion for oil, \$739 million for health services and \$99 million for education. The initial focus of these activities was to restore large plants neglected by the former regime, with the expectation that rehabilitating existing water and electricity plants and/or building new plants would create an initial injection and a stable base for Iraq's economic growth for years to come. Most of these projects are well underway, and almost all of the large infrastructure projects are expected to be completed by the end of calendar year 2006. (**Attachment 1, pg. 12**)

IRRF projects have added, rehabilitated or maintained more than 2,700 megawatts (MW) of electricity generation capacity on the grid, increasing feasible generation capacity by 30 percent; improved access to fresh water, benefiting 3.1 million Iraqis; and improved access to sewage, benefiting 5.1 million Iraqis. Approximately 32 percent of Iraq's 14,121 school buildings were rehabilitated or refurbished, 36,000 teachers have been trained, and 8.7 million new textbooks were provided to Iraqi school children. It is also estimated that nearly all Iraqi children have been inoculated against crippling diseases such as polio and measles, and hundreds of health clinics throughout Iraq have been rehabilitated. (**Attachment 1**)

⁵ To date, Congress has appropriated \$20.9 billion for relief and reconstruction programs in Iraq. In addition, Congress has appropriated \$1.3 billion for the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP), \$710 million for training and equipment, and \$5.4 billion for the Iraqi Security Forces Fund.

The Iraqi population has mixed views about the current status of the health care system. Results from the February 2004 National Survey of Iraq, a nationally representative survey conducted by Oxford Research International, (**Web Resource 2**) suggest that about one-half of the population at that time was unhappy with the availability of medical care. However, the same survey shows that about 45 percent of the population rated their current situation as an improvement over the pre-invasion period, and only 16 percent believed that things had worsened in terms of medical care availability.

The unhappiness of a large portion of the population may stem at least partly from the fact that much of what the Ministry of Health has been actively doing is not visible. Activities such as redesigning the university medical training curriculum, identifying target regions, assessing the costs of providing primary care, and designing disease surveillance systems – all of these will bring benefits that are not immediately tangible or obvious but are nonetheless crucial to the health of much of the population. (**Attachment 5**)

Security Environment in Iraq

The report prepared by the U.S. Embassy in Iraq rates the relatively calm semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north as stable in security. It finds six provinces, mainly in Sunni-populated northwestern Iraq, have a “serious” security situation, with the rebellious desert province of Anbar suffering from “critical” security problems. Security in Iraq’s nine southern Shiite provinces was seen as “stable,” or “moderate,” with the exception of oil-rich Basra, home to Iraq’s second largest city. In the holy southern Shiite cities of Kerbala and Najaf, the report states the local government is stable but warns of increasing Iranian influence. (**Attachment 6**)

As steady training produces more capable Iraqi Security and Police Forces, those forces have been able to better hold onto the cities that Iraqi and Coalition forces cleared together. As of March 20, 130,700 Ministry of Interior security personnel, or 67 percent of the authorized end strength of 195,000, have been trained and equipped. As of the same date, over 89,000 Iraqi Police Service (IPS), or 66 percent of the authorized end strength of 135,000, have been trained and equipped, an increase of over 14,000 since the December 15, 2005 parliamentary election. (**Attachment 1, pg. 22**)

These accomplishments in recruiting, training, equipping, and fielding capable Iraqi police forces are a significant step in the creation of a stable Iraq. Also, the ever increasing transfer of security responsibilities to Iraqi forces illustrates the success the coalition has had in building Iraqi capacity to provide for their own security.

The end-strength of the Iraqi Armed Forces is approximately 131,000 personnel. As of March 20, 111,000 personnel or 85 percent of the authorized end-strength has been trained and equipped. With the initial focus on establishing combat units, attention is now shifting toward the logistics backbone needed to facilitate independent operations. One hundred-two Iraqi Army and Special Operations battalions are now conducting counter-insurgency operations with 62 battalions “in the lead.” Iraqi Security Forces have conducted more independent operations than the Coalition in three of the last five months. (**Attachment 1, pg. 22**)

The increased capability of Iraqi forces to lead operations was evident in their efforts to prevent violence from escalating after the February 22 bombing of the Golden Mosque. According to the recent U.S. Policy in Iraq Report to Congress, there is no specific threshold for the number of Iraqi Armed Forces battalions that must be judged capable of operating independently before the number of U.S. forces in Iraq can be reduced. (**Attachment 1, pg. 22**)

Political Situation in Iraq

Building on the foundation of two prior electoral successes, the January 30, 2005 elections for a Transitional National Assembly and the October 15, 2005 constitutional referendum, over 12.2 million Iraqi voters (78 percent of eligible voters) went to the polls again on December 15, 2005 to elect a Council of Representatives, the first step in the formation of a government under Iraq’s new constitution. (**Attachment 1, pg. 3**)

In February 2006, the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) certified final election results. Political parties and leaders are now negotiating to form the executive branch of a new Iraqi government. The biggest sticking point in the political process has been whether incumbent Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari would serve a new four-year term. As a result of the December 2005 elections, the Shiite alliance comprised mainly

of the religious Dawa Party, led by Jaafari, and the more secular Supreme Council for the Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) party, led by Abdul Aziz Hakim command 128 of the 275 total seats. Because the Shiites were unable to gain a majority of the seats, they were forced to make concessions with Kurdish and Sunni factions, who control almost all of the other seats, in order to form a government and fill important cabinet posts.

Progress on government formation continues despite an upsurge in sectarian violence that stemmed from the February 22, 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. Those who attacked the Golden Mosque sought to exploit divisions among the Iraqi public and the political leadership to start a civil war. Iraqi government and religious leaders alike, in a demonstration of national unity, condemned the attacks and called for an end to sectarian unrest, and for security forces free from sectarian and militia loyalties. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the political process. The U.S. and international community joined Iraq in denouncing the attacks and underscored the importance of national unity and defying the terrorists and extremists who seek to provoke such conflict.

2. What goals have been established in these areas and what more remains to be done?

Reconstruction Measures

According to the testimony by Joseph A. Christoff, Director for International Affairs and Trade at GAO, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the major impediment to the U.S. reconstruction program is the difficulty with Iraq's ability to sustain the new and rehabilitated infrastructure and address maintenance needs. In the water, sanitation, and electricity sectors, in particular, some projects have been completed but have sustained damage or become inoperable due to Iraq's problems in maintaining or properly operating them. GAO noted that Iraqis need additional training and preparation to operate and maintain the power plants, water and sewage treatment facilities, and health care centers. (**Attachment 4, pg. 12**)

Mr. Christoff stated that "inadequate performance data and measures make it difficult to determine the overall progress and impact of U.S. reconstruction efforts." He is, however, encouraged to find that in response to GAO's

reports on Iraq, the Department of State has begun to develop metrics for measuring progress and plans for sustaining U.S.-built infrastructure.

Enduring Challenges

Poor security conditions have slowed reconstruction and increased costs. According to the State Department, security costs represent 16 to 22 percent of the overall costs of major infrastructure projects. (**Attachment 4, Highlights**)

Furthermore, over the past 2 ½ years, significant increases in attacks against the coalition and coalition partners have made it difficult to engage in rebuilding efforts in Iraq.

Iraq's local and provincial governments face significant challenges, a number of which stem from a long-standing history of a consolidated, centralized power structure in Baghdad and limited local authority. These governments continue to develop, while also attempting to perform various functions and deliver services. One of these functions is directing and coordinating Iraq's local security forces, especially Iraq's police forces, in conjunction with the national government as part of the overall system for maintaining civilian control over the ISF. The Coalition continues to increase the capacity of Iraq's local and provincial governments, with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) as the most recent initiative to bolster local and provincial governance. Only through a concerted advisory effort will these local and provincial governments mature into self-reliant entities that will stabilize the cities and territory of Iraq.

Past Mistakes

In September 2005, GAO reported that management challenges such as low initial cost estimates and delays in funding and awarding task orders have led to the reduced scope of the water and sanitation program and delays in starting projects.

Moreover, formerly state-owned companies in Iraq were banned from reconstruction contracts as part of the de-Baathification process. And because of Iraq's high level of centralization prior to the conflict, numerous skilled Iraqi workers were ineligible to assist in the rebuilding. Contractors

such as Bechtel have put substantial effort into hiring Iraqis, but there are still complaints. For example, Iraqis commonly say that they get too small a share of the reconstruction funds or only get lower-level jobs; that they have neither been asked how they want their infrastructure system to be rebuilt nor given a say in how reconstruction funds are spent; and that they could perform repairs and maintenance much better, much quicker, and for less money than foreign contractors. (**Web Resource 3, pg. 248**)

During the recent visit to Iraq by Secretary of State Rice and UK Foreign Secretary Straw, the issue of “tactical mistakes” received an exaggerated amount of media coverage. Secretary Rice tried to put the comment into perspective when she said that things that looked brilliant at the moment turn out in historical perspective to be mistakes, and the things that look like mistakes turn out to have been right decisions. (**Attachment 7**)

The administration outlined the political and economic criteria used to evaluate progress toward a stable Iraq in its latest Report to Congress. These conditions include: the formation of an inclusive and representative national government; ministries free from sectarian and militia influence; fully functioning government institutions with transparent practices, general accountability, and operating under general principles of good governance and the rule of law with a commitment to economic reform.

With respect to security, leaders of the Iraqi government, the United States government, and U.S. coalition partners in Iraq, assess when conditions permit handing over security responsibilities of specific areas from the Multi National Force-Iraq to the Iraqis.

To conclude, ongoing efforts are mostly on track to meet the criteria established by the administration. Most of these criteria, however, do not have hard metrics assigned to measure daily, weekly, or even monthly progress in the three tracks of the national strategy.

WITNESS TESTIMONY

PANEL ONE

The Honorable Mr. David M. Walker, Comptroller General for the U.S. Government Accountability Office, will testify about the recent oversight work and observations made by his office in the areas of reconstruction, governance, and security in Iraq. He will specifically address challenges the U.S. faces in its rebuilding and stabilization efforts and what the Iraqi government faces in financing future requirements.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Department of State, *Report to Congress: Pursuant to U.S. Policy in Iraq Act*, Section 1227 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (PL 109-163), 6 April 2006.
2. National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, November 2005.
3. Schmitt, Eric and Edward Wong, "U.S. Paints Somber Portrait of Iraqi Discord," *The New York Times*, 9 April 2006, pg. 1.1.
4. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Rebuilding Iraq: Stabilization, Reconstruction, and Financing Challenges*, GAO-06-428T, February 2006.
5. *U.S. Faulted On Efforts To Rebuild Nations, Healthcare Called Too Low a Priority*, Boston Globe, April, 19, 2006.
6. Multi-National Force-Iraq and U.S. Embassy Baghdad, *Provincial Stability Assessment*, 31 January
7. CNN.com, "Rice: Don't take Iraq errors 'literally,'" 1 April 2006.

WEB RESOURCES

1. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threat, and International Relations, hearing entitled *Iraq: Perceptions, Realities, and Cost to Complete*, 18 October 2005, <http://reform.house.gov/NSETIR/Hearings/EventSingle.aspx?EventID=35714>
2. Oxford Research International, *National Survey of Iraq*, February 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/150304iraqsurvey.pdf>
3. RAND Corporation, Center for Domestic and International Health Security, *Securing Health: Lessons from Nation-Building Missions*, 19 April 2006. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG321.pdf.

WITNESS LIST

Panel One

*The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office*

accompanied by

*Mr. Joseph A. Christoff
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office*